

SIDEWALKS, YOU HAVE QUESTIONS, WE WANT TO ANSWER!

How it all began? Back in 2016-17 the Board of Selectmen (BOS) reviewed some surveys regarding the recreational opportunities in Union. One of the major items mentioned were walking paths and sidewalks. The Town Manager reported on the Bike and Pedestrian program at Maine Department of Transportation (MDOT) and the BOS directed that we investigate that.

Why Depot Street: The Sidewalk Grant is a competitive program based on a multitude of criteria and depending on what criteria you meet the more points you receive. After meeting with the grant administrator and our engineer, it was determined that Depot Street would give us the highest point value, plus it had the worst condition existing sidewalk. It also gives us the opportunity to work with some outside groups to develop walking trails off the sidewalk route. This opportunity gives us the biggest bang for our buck and works toward the overall goal of more walking areas in Town.

Where is the sidewalk going? Phase 1 of the sidewalk will go from Common Road to Ayer Hill and is currently proposed on the south side of the road but that could change. Originally it was proposed to go to Ayer Park but due to high construction estimates this phase only allows us to go to Ayer Hill. When the grant was first written costs were reasonable, then construction cost rose significantly due to the lack of workers, so we were forced to reduce the scope. The ultimate goal is to extend it to Ayer Park, possibly by a trail on town property off the main road.

What is the cost to the Town? We have received a \$400,000 grant and the Town is responsible for an additional \$100,000 of which we have already encumbered \$70,000, so approximately \$30k remains for a half million-dollar investment to the Town. The Town will be responsible for clearing the sidewalk and maintaining it, just like all of our other infrastructure.

Please explain the reserve account. You may have heard we only have \$50k in the reserve account for sidewalks, that is technically true. However reserve accounts are not always designed to pay for the entire project but to shrink any tax implications in one year. The Board of Selectmen removed the additional \$50k this budget season because we would not need it until the next budget process, and all funds come out of the Public Works budget.

Will all trees be removed? No, some will be removed, some will be trimmed, and some new trees will be replanted. When DOT negotiates with the adjoining landowners there will be some more detailed information.

What are other phases? Other phases will be to continue on Ayer Hill or on the Town property to get to Ayer Park. This could include a walking path on Town property and crossing by the bridge to get to the park. Other phases will be to Four Corners, and eventually up to the Union Elementary School (not on Rt. 17). There are outside groups wishing to establish a walking trail off Depot Street on the old railroad tracks as well, the opportunities to partner with others is extremely valuable.

You do not take care of the Common Road sidewalks. This is a comment we hear often. These were put in by the State of Maine before the partnership program and the Town was not required to maintain these. They definitely need to be improved and when we start, we must make them ADA compliant. We are in hopes the MDOT will do a major upgrade on the Common Road in a few years that will take care of the poor drainage infrastructure; at that time, we can partner with them to improve those sidewalks. It is not financially responsible to upgrade the sidewalk there now and only to have it torn up in the future.

Can we use this money elsewhere? The funds are dedicated to the project the grant was written for, therefore we either use it on this dedicated project only or turn it back to the State for another municipality.

Have we committed funds from the Parks and Recreation budget or Pullen fund for this project? Wasn't this written into one of the responses to the MDOT? The recreation budget was in the application for the walking paths, signage, and any legal agreements with landowners they need. We have since had an outside trust tentatively agree to work on that, again once the project is approved. Pullen Fund was not requested this year due to the BOS wanting to put this on November's ballot and such funds would not be needed until the next fiscal year. Parks and Recreation funds could also be used to replace or add any trees, benches, etc.

Has the Town applied for a grant to replace trees? Is one available or possible? Are there other ways we can obtain additional funding? There are grants available for trees that we are eligible to apply for, but we need an approved project before we do. There may be some additional funding available once we have an approved project, it is fruitless to apply for grants until after the vote.

How do I see the actual preliminary plan? Go to the Town of Union's website at www.union.maine.gov and you will find the link to the MDOT online presentation. You will need to sign in with an e-mail address to access the program.

What if I have other questions? Please e-mail us at Townmanager@union.maine.gov or e-mail any of the Selectmen at the addresses on our website.

We will add to this questions and answer list each week with additional questions we receive.